

Magazine Feature Section

ATHLETE, 97 Years Old, Thanks SCIENTIFIC TRAINING



Photo of Baptiste's Arm

whole limb. Then the other leg is similarly kicked, and the process continues alternately on one leg and another. Twenty-five to fifty times are these leg movements repeated.

Hits Floor with Fists.

BAPTISTE explains that the leg and arm movements stimulate the functions of the extremities and make their health the greater for the regular and systematic exercise of them. But merely limb movements would not be sufficient, and such a restriction would be against his idea of normality. At 97, he can do what many men of 30 cannot do, and, indeed, what young fellows just coming into manhood find it difficult to essay. Standing erect, he raises his arms full length over his head, clenches his fists and bends his whole body at the waist, and nowhere else, until his fists not only touch but rap firmly on the floor.

Besides this, he practices a system of abdominal exercise which aids in digestion and keeps the fatty foods from lying dormant around the waist line. Swaying at the hips, flexing of the diaphragm, and sidewise bending at the waist are all part of his daily exercise. He goes through them all rapidly and often enough until they begin to fatigue him.

From the solitary work he turns to a simple bit of apparatus to conclude his few minutes in his home "gymnasium"—which consists of an ordinary room. Grasping the door jamb at about elbow height, he will bound up and down on his toes (without leaving the floor altogether) fifty times very rapidly.

From this he turns to a rope exerciser which he has and concludes his work-out with it, pulling on the cords for a few minutes to add a sort of physical condiment to the meal of calisthenics he has just enjoyed.

Athletics alone do not make an athlete. There is the deeper and more primary element of "just functioning" involved. We eat to live; by our food we are maintained, and it is highly essential to our peace and well-being that we eat proper foods and digest them thoroughly after we have taken them. Food is the source of sinew and muscle. And without food all the exercise in the world would mean just nothing at all. In fact, there would be no strength to do the exercising with, obviously.

In this connection does the normality of Baptiste reveal itself. Exercise is taken, he says, to invigorate the circulation of the blood, to send it coursing through the veins and arteries and most minute capillaries charged with the necessary elements of nourishment.

But there must be the proper kind of nourishment supplied beforehand. With Baptiste, life is an eternal period of training. He believes that, as the mind continues to learn more and more constantly, so the body should be given a chance to develop in its own physiological way. Exercise quickens the blood, sharpens the appetite and aids the digestion. Baptiste well supplies the food for nourishment, for satisfying the appetite and for supplementing digestion.

Three good meals a day are his quota. Arising at 6 o'clock every morning, he has breakfast, after his exercise, at about 7. He eats lunch at noon, and his evening meal comes around half-past 4 or 5 in the afternoon.

A hearty breakfast, a light lunch and a full supper form his daily custom of eating. Eggs, melon, never more than one cup of coffee and sometimes not that, cereals and milk constitute his morning meal. The lunch is light, consisting only of a "snack," a sandwich and a drink of some kind—but not intoxicants. And for supper he has meat or fish, cooked vegetables, and any good substantial bit of food that occurs to his wife, such as fried eggplant and the like.

In Baptiste there has always been the deep foundations of the true athlete. Like the ancient Greeks of old, he has taken his body as a noble work and applied common sense, every-day principles to it here in America, far from the rich and cultured land of his birth.

It is in his extreme normality and regularity of living that his old age may be explained. When the season for football or baseball or any sport approaches, the athletes who intend to participate in it go into training, impose upon themselves a diet, rather rigorous, and do more strenuously in a concentrated period what Baptiste does all year. He is the continuous figure ready for any normal need of life. If he had to go into a particular sport it would be of no trouble for him. He would merely learn the skilled part of the game; the strength he already has.

Two Poses of Alexander Baptiste



ONCE upon a time—this is not a fairy story but a bit of mythology—there was a little boy named Achilles. He was destined to be a great warrior, and his mother was aware of his future. With the zealous anxiety of all mothers, she wanted her boy to be a very good warrior. And to be a good warrior he must be of such character that he could not be killed.

Accordingly, this boy's mother took him one day to the River Styx, fabled in the mythology of antiquity, and dipped him in the charmed waters of the stream. Now this river possessed properties which would make a person invulnerable if immersed in it. Achilles was no exception; the immersion worked and he became invulnerable—all except the heel by which his mother had held him during the process. He grew up and was a great warrior (measured in terms of his invulnerability), until he was shot in the heel and was fatally wounded. The trouble was that he had one very weak spot.

From the warrior of antiquity with his one weak heel to the actual physical body of the twentieth century man is a far cry. But that tale, applied modernly, was only a figure of speech to show that a body, like a chain, is no stronger than its weakest link.

The value of a well-developed body is readily admitted; the training necessary to obtain and maintain it is not so promptly indulged in. There is not a single sport requiring physical exertion of any sort whatever that does not absolutely demand a symmetrical proportioned body for real championship class. The whole foundation of all athletics is the proper and dignified care and development of the body before any specialization is even thought of. The carefully prepared and preserved body is like an engine with steam up, all groomed and ready to go—anywhere. As with the engine, it does not matter where the body goes—what its exertions are, if the mechanism and the rails are ready.

Living Proof Convinces.

BUT these are platitudes, readily admitted but not so quickly proved. The living, breathing proof is of far more importance than all the physical axioms in the world. And when that proof is a hale young man of 97 long years, it is all the more convincing.

That is anticipating just a little bit. It is not only the man of 97 who lends favor to the value of a thoroughly well-kept body; it is his family.

Alexander Baptiste was born shortly after Napoleon had ceased to be the bugaboo to countless European children, about the time that Metternich and his school of conservative diplomats began to absorb the whole stage of European politics. Today he is healthy, normal, clear-eyed and as steady in the nerves as he ever was.

In the memory of men today, such a period is only known through the histories. Alexander Baptiste of St. Louis and St. Louis County lived it. He was born in Athens, Greece, in 1819—December 14, 1819, to be exact. Emigrating to America at an early age, he came to St. Louis in 1849, when Eighth street was "way out in the country" and Indians and the dense North American forest hedged in the baby city of the Mississippi Valley.

Baptiste's father lived 117 years; he expects to live as long, unless, as he quaintly expressed it, he gets shot or something falls on him from one of the tall buildings of the St. Louis which now extends for miles north, south and west.

Baptiste has a son who is 52 years old, and who is known throughout the country as one of the best middleweight wrestlers of his time.

The living father and son are keen of mind and intensely active men. The father shows none of his venerable years and the son looks more like a man of 35 than 52.

The secret? It is the secret of how to be young in physique although old in years. And Baptiste declares it is to be revealed only in the proper keeping of the body through training, dieting (not deprivation, but sensible choosing of food) and exercise. In a word, longevity, Ponce De Leon's fountain of eternal youth, and the chimera of other seekers after a life of a great span, is the result of athletics scientifically applied.

Walks Briskly, Firmly.

IN appearance Baptiste is quite different from the conventional conception of a man of his age. To see him walking down the street, briskly and firmly, one would never even approximate his age. He is sturdy of build, about 5 feet 8 inches tall, and weighs around 200 pounds—without being anything but muscle and sinew. His face bears none of the traditional wrinkles of age; it has been against his ideals to be annoyed by the thousand and one things which upset mortals of perhaps more susceptible temperaments, but less nerve control. His hair is coal black, sprinkled here and there with a strand of gray. His mustache is full and black.

Flexing his muscles, he displays underneath a clear skin supple rolls of sinew which are neither too hard nor yet soft with the inroads of time. In them is the full rounded strength indicative of health and activity. The hardy arms of the man are valuable not only as a means of display, but also as a source of actual power. And the grip of his hand is that of a man in his prime.

His sight is perfect to the extent of his not requiring glasses to read fine print; his hear-

ing is fairly good, and his body entirely normal. The old young man presents a picture of health and vitality.

The how of it—the so-called secret, he declares, is no secret at all. Himself the essence of normality, he preaches, when he can be induced to talk at all about himself, the gospel of normality. He should be an evangelist, going about gaining proselytes for the religion of regular habits. Unlike many preachers, he would be a living specimen of the value of his dogma.

In the course of his regular daily life, Baptiste has provided a time for exercise. He believes some well-designed form of athletics is

absolutely necessary. His takes the form of regular and comprehensive gymnastics before breakfast.

When he arises in the morning after a long night's sleep in a bedroom, the windows of which are open wide winter or summer, he engages in from fifteen minutes to half an hour's good hard work with himself. His exercises are many and varied. They must be so if he is to keep the many organs of his body functioning properly.

With his heels together and standing erect, he works his arms and shoulders. He strikes out vigorously straight to the sides as though he were hitting a hard blow just at arm's

length from him. Then he throws his arms forward, fists always clenched tightly. Upward and backward the arms go with the same snap and strength-building zest. Such movements, the simple arm movements, are repeated from twenty-five to fifty times on every occasion of his exercise. They keep the biceps and triceps and forearm muscles capable of doing their proper work, and, moreover, bring all the shoulder muscles into free play.

Following these, he practices a leg drill. Standing with his hands on his hips, he draws up first one leg with the knee as high as it can go and kicks out, almost viciously and with a force that sends the blood hurtling through the